

DEAD MEN CAN'T SEE

A STUDY OF I CORINTHIANS 2:14

BY ZACK M. GUESS

THE NATURAL MAN

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." This passage from I Cor. 2:14 tells us that the natural man (the man who has not been born from above by the Holy Spirit) is totally unable to receive or even to understand anything of a truly spiritual nature. The natural man may be extremely intelligent and well-read; he may be very cultural and sophisticated; he may be artistic and able to converse in several languages -- but he cannot understand even one small spiritual truth while he remains in his natural state.

This man may read the Bible and even memorize whole chapters from it, but he cannot really grasp its true and deepest meaning. This man may go through the motions of prayer, but he is not really praying as far as God is concerned.

Why is this so?

Because the natural man does not have spiritual life. He is totally dead to the entire realm of the Holy Spirit. How did he get to be this way? The first man on the earth, Adam, disobeyed God's command and brought death -- both spiritual and physical death -- down upon the entire race of mankind. The Apostle Paul states the case in Romans 5:12 -- "Wherefore, as by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

The purely natural man has physical life but he is spiritually dead. In the Bible this is called being "dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. 2:1). All men are nothing more than natural men from their very conception, and they remain this way unless God gives them spiritual life. David even said, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51:5).

Natural men do not realize how very dead they are!

Christ once talked to a group of these natural men who didn't realize that as far as spiritual things were concerned, they were utterly dead. He was speaking to a group of Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day. He said, "Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word." (John 8:43). This is a remarkable statement. These men did actually hear the words spoken by Jesus, yet Jesus said that they didn't hear His words. Furthermore, he said that they *could not* hear His words. So there must have been a deeper level of hearing that went beyond the mere physical sound of Jesus' voice. And as far as this level was concerned, these Pharisees were dead, even though they had physical life.

And they are not the only ones who are dead.

Christ said, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." (John 8:47). So only the people of God can really *hear* and spiritually *understand* the words of God. They are foolishness to everyone else.

I would like to ask a question. Are God's words foolish to you?

ALIVE, YET DEAD

How can a man have physical life, be intelligent and active, and yet be dead to the things of God? Why is a man who is able to comprehend physical realities unable to do the same with spiritual phenomena? The simple answer is this: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (1 John 5:12). So a man may have tremendous physical vitality and be as dead as a stone to the true realities. This explains why many scientists with very high levels of intelligence are able to deny the things of God and some of them actually deny the very existence of God. They may be very brilliant men but they are also dead men.

John said that, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3). All men are natural men and nothing more at conception. But God gives spiritual life to some by causing them to be born again, and then they are able to see and understand the glorious realities of the kingdom of God. Then they are possessors of both natural and spiritual life. And it must be added that a man is no more able to obtain spiritual life by his own efforts than he is to obtain natural life on his own. The giving of spiritual life is wholly the work of God who gives spiritual life to whom He pleases (Rom. 9:15).

But to better understand the mystery of how a man can be alive physically but dead to spiritual things at the same time, let us consider the following: A dog has natural life. There are many things that a dog has in common with a man. They both eat, they run, they breathe, they play, they hunt, etc. but when it comes to the world of rational thought and speech, the dog is *dead* to the man's world of thought.

In like manner, a man may have physical life and be able to function brilliantly in the world of thought, but, at the same time, be completely dead in so far as the spiritual realm is concerned. A natural man and a "born-again" spiritual man have much in common. They both have physical needs and appetites; they both operate on a high intellectual level and are able to think in the abstract. They can both communicate with speech and can work with mathematics. They can both marry and raise families. There is so much that they have in common. But when they reach the limit of natural realities and enter the threshold of the things of God, the purely natural man must **stop**. He **cannot** enter here. He is **not** equipped to do so. He is **dead** to this world!

A purely natural man is as dead to the things of the Spirit as the dog is dead to the man's world of the intellect.

A mere natural man may read the Bible, may learn all of its original languages, may make a close study of its grammar, and still not *really* understand what God is saying in it. He may think that he understands -- many of those Pharisees thought that they understood, too, but Jesus said that they did not understand His speech and could not even hear His word (John 8:43).

On the other hand, the most ignorant and handicapped child of God can understand more of the *true meaning* of Scripture and other spiritual things than the most brilliant of natural men. In fact, the natural man can understand *exactly nothing* of the true import of Scripture. Jesus said in this regard: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." (Matt. 11:25,26).

The spiritual man will love the Lord God; it is impossible for the natural man to do so.

The spiritual man has repented of his evil ways and turned to God for mercy. Have you repented toward God? Do you feel the need of repentance? The natural man does not even feel the need of repentance.

THE CASE OF THE DEAD BIBLE SCHOLAR

I have on my desk a book written by a very brilliant and learned student of the Bible. In his own words he says that this book "is the outcome of an endeavor which has extended over forty years to discover who the man Jesus Christ really was." It seems wonderful that a man would spend forty years of hard labor to find Jesus Christ. The only problem is that from all appearances the author is a *dead man*. He did not find the real Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, because he did not have eyes to see or ears with which to hear. He did not seek Jesus because he wished to adore and worship Him, but that he might blaspheme Him and tell lies about Him. What this man has written in his book shows so clearly that Jesus Christ can't be found by the natural man, no matter how brilliant and studious he may be.

The name of the scholar is Hugh J. Schonfield. the name of his book is The Passover Plot. Let us examine a part of it. We may gain some insight into the workings of the mind of the natural man. This man thinks he is a free agent (all natural men make a loud boast of their vaunted freedom). But to all appearances he is an abject slave to Satan and to sin. Satan is the real author of all the lies about the Son of God which he promotes in his book. Schonfield states that as a youth, the Person of Jesus greatly attracted him (p. 12). But what a morbid attraction it proved to be! He was not like the Wise Men who wanted to find Jesus to worship Him; rather, he was like King Herod who wanted to find Jesus that he might hurt and kill him.

In this man's diligent search he even made a translation of the Christian Scriptures from the original Greek. But in the process he denied that the Scriptures are the inspired word of God (p. 14). He does this primarily because he wishes to do away with the miraculous element in the New Testament. He wants to deal with Jesus merely as a man of flesh and blood and to explain Him apart from being the divine Son of God. This is a common tactic among men who are dead in trespasses and in sins.

In doing away with the supernatural he denies that Jesus Christ was born of Mary the virgin (p. 48). This is a flat denial of the Scriptures (Matt. 1:18-25), and amounts to calling God a liar. To use his own words, Schonfield says: "There was nothing peculiar about the birth of Jesus. He was not God incarnate and no Virgin Mother bore him. The Church in its ancient zeal fathered a myth and became bound to it as dogma" (p. 50).

THE FAIRY DUST OF FAITH

A blind man **cannot** see. A man dead in sin **cannot** receive spiritual things. Jesus, in speaking to His disciples about the Holy Spirit, said: "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world **cannot** receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him . . ." (John 14:17). All that a purely natural man can see is limited to the natural world. The things of the Spirit appear as utter foolishness to him. Schonfield shows his utter inability to "see" in the following statement: "With the birth stories of Jesus, and of John the Baptist also, we pass directly from the world of sober reality into the world of fairy tale" (p. 49); a horribly blasphemous statement that reveals the author's complete blindness. But then, even though he means to be irreverent and sarcastic, he unwittingly utters a great truth. He says, "All we need is the application to our eyes of the fairy dust called faith to enable us to see and acknowledge this."

Schonfield meant to be sarcastic but what he said contained a great truth. Men cannot see without faith. Not all men have faith (II Thess. 3:2). Men cannot please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). No one has the ability to just reach out and *get* faith. Faith is a gift of God's grace (Eph. 2:8). God sovereignly gives this gift to whomever He pleases and withholds it at His pleasure (Rom 9:15,16). As far as true Christians are concerned, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (II Cor. 5:7). This is why one with faith can believe the account of miracles in the Bible and those, like Schonfield, who have only natural sight, are utterly incapable of such belief. This lack of faith is what makes the Bible such a strange book to him.

THE PASSOVER PLOT

Schonfield's main thesis is that Jesus *thought* He was the Messiah. He planned His life so that it would be a fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. He even planned His death on the cross, but he arranged that a narcotic would be given Him so that He would just appear to be dead. He also arranged that someone would take Him down, put Him in a cave-tomb, and revive Him. Then He would appear as if He had risen from the dead. Schonfield says, however, that when the Roman soldier thrust his spear into Jesus' side that He was wounded so badly, He revived just long enough to give some last minute instructions and then He died never to rise again.

In speaking of this plan Schonfield says, "A conspiracy had to be organized of which the victim was himself the deliberate secret instigator. It was a nightmarish conception and undertaking, the outcome of the frightening logic of a sick mind, or a genius" (p. 132).

It is difficult to see how more blasphemous ideas could be entertained or more ungodly words could be written. If anyone doubts this conclusion he has good reason to wonder whether he has eyes to see or ears to hear.

What do you think the Almighty God thinks of these words written about the Son of God who took on Himself a body of flesh and lived, suffered, and died on behalf of His people? What do you think the Lord will do about such words as these? What would you men do if someone called your wife a whore? Would you just smile and shake his hand and agree with him? If you did, what kind of an excuse for a man would you consider yourself to be? What do you think the God of heaven will do to one who calls His Son a liar and a fraud and never repents of it?

Vengeance is mine; I **will** repay, saith the Lord." (Rom. 12:19)

CHRISTIAN BEWARE

Satan is no fool. He will do anything he can to win the favor of God's people and, like the spider, entice them into his net. We must beware. Schonfield says a lot of nice things about Jesus, but this must mean nothing to us when we consider the total impact of his message. He does this to gain the sympathy of a Christian audience. It is as if someone tortured and killed your family and then said, "Oh, what a lovely family you had."

And even in the nice things that this dead man says about Jesus, he lies. For instance: "We have to accept the absolute sincerity of Jesus. But this does not require us to think of him as omniscient and infallible" (p. 41). Or again: "The historical Jesus has always been there for the finding, not faultless, not inerrant, not divine, but magnificently human" (p. 185).

Christ said that He was the divine Son of God. Schonfield says that Christ is a liar.

"Let God be true, but every man a liar..." (Rom. 3:4).

If Christ was a mere man there is no hope for us; there is nothing but despair. Paul tells us the full implications of this: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain . . . And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sin . . . If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:14,17,19).

I am thankful that I do not share the blasphemy of this dead man, Schonfield. My God is the God of the Scriptures. He lives and moves. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16) I believe Him when He says, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death" (Rev. 1:18).

Because I believe this, I want to say, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. 19:6).

CAN YOU HEAR?--CAN YOU SEE?

Do you share this faith in a triumphant, resurrected, reigning Christ, whom you acknowledge as Lord? If so, then, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Matt. 13:16).

Are you an unbeliever? If so, then remember that, "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (II Thess. 1:7-9).